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Finnur Jónsson : *Den oldnorske og oldislandske Literaturs Historie*. Vol. I-II, 1 and 2. Copenhagen, 1893-97.

THE importance of Finnur Jónsson's History of the Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic Literature, and the long time necessarily consumed in its completion justify its being reviewed in this Journal before the work is completed. Finnur Jónsson, professor of Icelandic at the University of Copenhagen, is, by his intimate knowledge and thorough comprehension of the subject matter, qualified as hardly any other living man to write the history of Icelandic literature. He is one of the hardest working and most productive of modern Scandinavian philologists, and Scandinavian philology is especially, among other things, indebted to him for a series of valuable editions of old Icelandic manuscripts. Among his chief exploits in this line must be counted the phototype and diplomatic edition of the so-called elder or Saemundar Edda, which he jointly with his colleague, Professor Wimmer, published a few years ago, furthermore, the Egils Saga, the Biskupa Sögur and the Heimskringla, now in the course of being published.

The history of the Old Norse and Icelandic literature has not of late, in its full extension, been a very much cultivated field. G. Vigfusson has in the Prolegomena to his Sturlunga Saga given a pretty complete, although short, synopsis of Icelandic literature, but the often peculiar and untenable ideas of that scholar detract something from the value of that otherwise useful work. The Scandinavian treatments of the subject prior to the work now in the course of publication are at the present time, all of them, rather antiquated, and Finnur Jónsson's history is, therefore, exceedingly welcome.

The work will, when finished, consist of three volumes: the first volume treating of Old Norwegian and Icelandic poetry up to the time of 1100 A. D.; the second volume dealing with poetry and prose of the second period (1100 to 1300 A. D.); and the third which is going to be devoted to the period extending from about 1300 to about 1450.

The author in the three parts of the first volume and in the first part of the second volume treats of the Old Norwegian-Icelandic poetry at considerable length; it is characteristic of the author as well as of the great majority of the present generation of Scandinavian scientists, in contradistinction from the former generations, that it seems as if he does not allow the national point of view

to influence his scientific results. Even in such places where the reviewer must disagree with the author, as it is sure to happen in a work like the present one, it cannot be said that this is due to the author's having been guided in his scientific reasoning by national sympathies or prejudices. The author discusses with considerable fullness the question of the nationality and the age of Eddic poetry. This poetry was a few decades ago a bone of contention between the Scandinavian scholars, the Norwegian authors, particularly *R. Keyser*, maintaining that these poems were produced in Norway, while the Danish school headed by *S. Grundtvig* just as stoutly maintained that they were either Icelandic or Common Norse, *i. e.* pre-Norwegian, Danish, thus eliminating Norway entirely. The author arrives at the result that the Eddic poems were produced during the period from about 850 to about 1050 A. D., mostly in Norway, a few in Iceland and some in Greenland. With reference to the age of the Eddic poems professor Jónsson is in accord with most modern philological authors in contradistinction from the earlier scientists who attributed a very much higher age to these poems. But as far as concerns the place of their production he assumes a position entirely his own, at variance with the one taken by *G. Vigfusson*, who thinks that several of these poems were produced in the Western Isles, a belief partly shared by Professor *Bugge* of Christiania. Our author maintains that the occurrence of words showing Celtic or Anglo-Saxon influence in the poems is not a sufficient basis upon which to rest the assertion that these poems are produced in the Western Islands, the less so, as these Islands otherwise play an anything but prominent part in the Old Norse-Icelandic literature. It seems as if the author's position here is a sound one.

In his treatment of the individual Eddic poems, particularly *Völuspá* and *Hávamál* the author seems to me to have allowed himself to be too much influenced by *Müllenhoff's* higher criticism contained in the fifth volume of his *Alterthumskunde*. Thus, for instance, he unhesitatingly accepts that author's rejection of verses 5 and 6 of *Völuspá* as interpolated. In the reviewer's opinion we have here to deal with one of the most unfortunate attempts at fitting poetry to the Procrustean bed of the philologist; it is really a pity that the learned interpreters of the great poets often have so little sense for poetry. In this present case I think it can be satisfactorily shown that *Müllenhoff* and all those who

after him have blindly assumed the mentioned strophes to be interpolated are in the wrong.

Völuspá, as is well known, is the Old Norse cosmogony and theogony. Whether it is influenced by Christian ideas and poetry, as Bugge and others maintain, or it is a genuine exponent of Heathen Norwegian thought and imagination, as Müllenhoff, Hoffory and Jónsson believe, is immaterial for the question here at issue.

Strophe 3 reads: 'In the beginning when Ymir built (*i. e.* lived), there was neither sand, nor sea, nor the cold waves; the earth was not to be seen nor heaven above; there was a yawning chasm, but grass nowhere.' Strophe 4 continues: 'ere the sons of Borr raised the earth, those who made the blessed modgard (earth). The sun shone from south on the dwelling-stones, then the fields were grown with green herbs.' Then comes strophe 5 which Müllenhoff wants to throw out: 'The sun past from south, the companion of the moon, his right hand over the edge of heaven; the sun knew not where he had his resting-places, the moon did not know what she had for power, the stars did not know where they had their places.' Strophe 6: 'Then all the powers, the most holy gods, assembled to the judgment seats and consulted about it; they gave names to night and new moon; they named morning and midday, afternoon and evening, for the counting of years.'

Müllenhoff's and his followers' objection to strophe 5 is that it makes the sun appear unruly and unsteady after it has in strophe 4 appeared in its regular function. But what is really the case? In strophe 4 the sun appears and of course, immediately exerts its beneficent influence on vegetation, but still that does not imply that the regular order of the world is yet firmly established. Therefore strophe 5 in a beautiful poetic figure, which nobody whose mind is not entirely dried up by philosophic dust can fail to understand, repeats the story of the arrival of the sun. The sun threw from the south his right hand over the edge of the heavens. The metaphor here is, of course, exactly as when Homer speaks about *ροδοδάκτολις ἥως*; and that the sun throws its hands does not mean that it clings to the edge of heaven (Hoffory) or fumbles it (Müllenhoff), but that it throws its rays over the horizon. But still the sun had no regular course prescribed to it, the stars had no fixed positions, and the moon did not know her power. Müllenhoff takes exception to the fact that while with the sun and the stars there is question of place, with the moon there is question of power. Nothing could more clearly show the groundlessness of his objections. Language

itself bears witness to the power which popular belief through the ages has ascribed to the moon. 'Then the powers, the high gods, went to their council seats and brought order into this chaos.' (They created morning and midday, etc.) And the sun is called 'the companion of the moon.' This does not necessarily imply that they appear together; it may merely mean that they hold a necessary relationship to each other in the regular order of the world. While Müllenhoff considers this expression to be the greatest nonsense and calls the whole strophe some miserable botch of an interpolator, Hoffory by a mere chance found out that this phrase presented a picture of the greatest strength and force, and therefore believed it to originally belong to another poem from which it had been interpolated into the *Völuspá*. Hoffory happened to read a little piece by Björnson entitled *A New Vacation Outing*, describing a summer trip to the North Cape, where the simultaneous appearance of the moon with the midnight sun is described in glowing colors, and Hoffory finds here the picture of nature that served as a background for the author of the cosmogonic poem from which he presumes this strophe to have been interpolated. This Hoffory's explanation of the *Völuspá* figure has come to be generally accepted, and it may, therefore, not be out of place to say a few words about it. In the first place, it would seem strange that two different authors should in two different poems independently use the rhyme words: *sol—sunnan*. While with the slight change the repetition comes splendidly as an epanalysis in strophe 5 from strophe 4. Besides it is not natural to suppose that an everyday occurrence like the appearance of the midnight sun would serve as the prototype for the description of a cosmogonic occurrence. And the reviewer who himself has seen the midnight sun time and again can state that this sight does not make any particularly strong impression on the inhabitants of Northern Norway. But another natural occurrence that makes a strong impression is when the sun appears again after the long absence during the winter. And that fits much better into the picture: the sun throwing his right hand over the edge of the heaven. So if we are to presume that a natural scenery has served the author as prototype, then it is much more reasonable to suppose the reappearance of the sun after the winter-night to have been the model than the midnight sun. But there is no necessity of believing in such a simultaneous appearance of sun and moon.

While Finnur Jónsson supposes the Eddic poems to be of comparatively recent origin, he believes in the genuineness of the Scaldic

poems ascribed to the oldest, almost mythical Norwegian scalds, like Brage the old, whose poems he attributes to the beginning of the 9th century. That our author is wrong here has been clearly shown by Professor Bugge in a book entitled *Bidrag til den Oldste Skaldedigtningens historie*, Christiania, 1894. But it would be too long here to enter upon that discussion.

Although we may say that our author to a certain extent is lacking in the poetic sense necessary in order to fully appreciate the Eddic poetry, it must be admitted that as an expert of Scaldic poetry he stands without equal and his treatment of this branch of chiefly Icelandic literature is, therefore, very satisfactory.

The treatment of the prose literature is as yet not so far advanced that a judgment can well be passed upon it. It is as yet limited to a general discussion of those conditions upon which that literature is based, and the reasons why it developed to such a classical perfection in Iceland, also of the extent to which the Icelandic sagas can be relied upon as historic documents, in which respect the author assigns to them a high value, higher probably than modern historic criticism is willing to grant them.

The historian Ari hinn fródi is the only prose author Jónsson has as yet reached to discuss, and he here gains the result that Ari wrote the two editions of the Icelanders' book, but that the Kings' lives that generally are ascribed to him as an independent work, probably must have been a part of the first (large) *Islandinga bók*.

The author's chief merits are his exhaustive knowledge of the subject-matter, his thorough comprehension of Icelandic, particularly Scaldic language and spirit, his sound and clear reasoning; his greatest shortcoming is a certain dryness and lack of poetic appreciation which makes the scientist in his case more prominent than the literateur.

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